

VZCZCXRO0810
PP RUEHDBU
DE RUEHAH #1052/01 2781247
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 051247Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7875
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY PRIORITY 5449
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 2864
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0033
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0059
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY 0031
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 1682
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0418
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0034
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0484
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 4980
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0045
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-2/REA/NMJIC-J2// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J5/RUE// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 001052

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DOD FOR DASD MACDOUGALL
DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/05/2016

TAGS: [EPET](#) [IR](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#) [TX](#) [US](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR DASD MACDOUGALL'S OCTOBER 17-18
VISIT TO TURKMENISTAN

REF: A. 04 ASHGABAT 261

- [1](#)B. ASHGABAT 932
- [1](#)C. ASHGABAT 804
- [1](#)D. ASHGABAT 1002 AND PRIOR
- [1](#)E. ASHGABAT 864

ASHGABAT 00001052 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Jennifer L. Brush for reasons 1.
4 (B) and (D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Embassy Ashgabat welcomes your visit but fears the Government of Turkmenistan may now have developed cold feet regarding signing a Mary Divert Agreement. Although the agreement originally was proposed by President Niyazov to State's Deputy Assistant Secretary Lynn Pascoe in 2004 (ref a), events in the intervening years, including the new Gazprom deal signed in September (ref b), Iranian President Ahmadinejad's July 24 visit (ref c), and increased world concern over Turkmenistan's abysmal human rights record -- including this September's death in prison of journalist Ogulsapar Myradova (ref d), may have given Niyazov a diminished appetite for dealing with the Americans. Though Charge has repeatedly asked Foreign Minister Meredov for a meeting to discuss status of this agreement, during a series of national day events and Iftar suppers, and followed up with telephone requests, Meredov has not yet agreed. DASD MacDougall should be prepared for the possibility that Meredov will not be approved to meet, or that should a meeting occur, Meredov will remain noncommittal on the agreement. Embassy repeats its assessment that the Government of Turkmenistan has a record of not living up to its international agreements, even were an agreement to be signed, and also that absent an agreement, Turkmenistan

likely will grant landing rights to U.S. flights in distress on an ad hoc basis. End Summary.

Niyazov's Idea

¶2. (C) During the first thaw in Turkmenistani-U.S. relations following the 2002 assassination attempt, in March 2004 President Niyazov proposed to then-DAS Lynn Pascoe that Turkmenistan offer Mary Air Base to the United States for use in emergency situations. Following this offer, Niyazov made cryptic mention of his proposal to a series of U.S. VIPs including CENTCOM Commander Abizaid and former Deputy Assistant Secretary Laura Kennedy. The USG delivered a draft divert agreement to the government on April 23, 2006. In response to frequent U.S. requests for a response to its draft, in July Foreign Minister Meredov told Charge the government would respond following the July 24-25 visit to Turkmenistan of Iranian President Ahmadinejad. President Niyazov made an oblique reference to the agreement during PDAS Steven Mann's August 14 visit (ref e), saying "we have reviewed your document and will be approving it soon." On the margins of Peace Corps Regional Director Jay Katzen's September 20 meeting, in response to Charge's question, Meredov said, "you heard the president during the Mann visit, don't worry." During the Armenian National Day event on September 29, Charge told Meredov of DASD MacDougall's visit and said the latter either expected to sign or already have the agreement signed. At that point Meredov again told Charge that she had heard the president and when the Charge noted the president's intention to sign, Meredov corrected her saying she had not understood the "nuances" of the president's statement. Meredov declined to comment further but assured Charge of a meeting to discuss the agreement September 30 or October 2, both of which came and went with no follow-through from the minister in spite of repeated

ASHGABAT 00001052 002.2 OF 003

telephone calls. Accompanied by the DATT, Charge again approached Meredov at German National Day on October 3 to note embassy had now formally requested a meeting with him for DASD MacDougall on October 18. Charge noted she would be leaving the country October 6 for a week and urged Meredov to meet while she was still in country. Meredov agreed and but again did not follow up, in spite of a formal diplomatic note request for a meeting for October 5.

¶3. (C) This behavior on Meredov's part is becoming typical. Whereas in the past, he would readily agree to meet on Charge's request, usually on the same day, beginning with his not being allowed to meet with PDAS Mann on August 14, Meredov has become increasingly inaccessible.

¶4. (C) Embassy has requested meetings for you with both Foreign Minsiter Meredov and Minister of Defense and National Security Council Secretary GEN Mammetgeldiyev. Although the latter technically in a higher government post than the Foreign Minister, he is unlikely to play any role in the decision and your meeting with him mostly is a courtesy.

The United States no Longer Useful Leverage?

¶5. (C) This inaccessibility roughly also coincides with the September 5 deal with Gazprom to sell gas for \$100 thousand cubic meters, the subject of a year-long negotiation. During this negotiation Niyazov promised vast quantities of gas to a series of potential and actual buyers including Iran and China, through a series of additional pipelines including a Trans-Afghan and Trans-Caspian pipeline and a pipeline to China. In the end, observers in Ashgabat believe Niyazov's only goal was to obtain higher prices from Gazprom.

¶6. (C) Niyazov apparently also has a healthy sense of unease about his new neighboring president, Ahmadinejad. Meredov

said as much when he requested that negotiations on the Mary Divert Agreement be postponed until after the state visit. Niyazov himself admitted to PDAS Mann that the visit was "difficult," and the diplomatic corps in Ashgabat were impressed by how much Niyazov allowed his guest to dictate the agenda. Though purely speculation, it is not inconceivable that Ahmadinejad warned Niyazov off of cooperation with the United States.

17. (C) The government also is keeping mum on the cause of death in prison of journalist Ogulsapar Myradova, sticking to legalities and not addressing the international community's core concern regarding lack of transparency and due process regarding the case. Turkmenistan got beaten up over the case at the September 21 OSCE Permanent Council meeting and has been demarched by the EU, OSCE and United States. Charge also has made it clear to Meredov over the past month that Turkmenistan's Jackson-Vanik waiver extension is under critical review as a result of lack of progress in addressing freedom of movement issues here.

What Happens Absent an Agreement

18. (C) As embassy has noted in the past, Turkmenistan is likely to permit distressed U.S. aircraft to land in Mary, even without an agreement. Meredov has noted this on several occasions to Charge and Niyazov said as much to PDAS Mann, "in the meantime, our doors are open." And even with an agreement, Turkmenistan has a track record of honoring agreements on an ad hoc basis.

Comment

ASHGABAT 00001052 003.2 OF 003

19. (C) Embassy will continue to encourage the government to sign the agreement. If a signed agreement is too much politically for Niyazov at this point, we might want to consider resorting to an exchange of diplomatic notes, as was, and continues to be the case with the Gas and Go and Blanket Overflight arrangements. Embassy encourages DASD MacDougall to consider alternatives to a signed agreement, if such an agreement is too politically hot for Turkmenistan (Niyazov) to sign at the moment. We look forward to your visit. End Comment.
BRUSH